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GRANT NUMBER: DAMD17-97-1-7239

TITLE: A Cell Culture Model for Understanding Estrogen Receptor
Regulation in Normal and Malignant Cells

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REPORT DATE: October 1998

TYPE OF REPORT: Annual

PREPARED FOR: Commander
U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command
Fort Detrick, Frederick, Maryland 21702-5012

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20000209 175

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)

2. REPORT DATE
October 1998

3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED
Annual (9/30/97 - 9/29/98)

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

A Cell Culture Model for Understanding Estrogen Receptor Regulation in Normal and Malignant Cells

5. FUNDING NUMBERS

DAMD17-97-1-7239

6. AUTHOR(S)

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7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

University of California at Berkeley
Ernest O. Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION
REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command
Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

10. SPONSORING / MONITORING
AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)

Purpose:

To characterize a spontaneous epithelial-to-mesenchymal conversion (EMT) in the non-transformed "functional normal" mammary epithelial cell line SCp2.

- Determine if the mesenchymal conversion in SCp2 cells is associated with tumorigenesis.
- Determine if alterations in growth factor expression and regulation are accompanied by changes in ECM and metalloproteinases expression.
- Determine if the presence of 3D structure is critical to stopping spontaneous and induced conversion.

14. SUBJECT TERMS

Estrogen receptors, estrogen, extra cellular matrix, epithelial-stromal interaction

15. NUMBER OF PAGES

5

16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF REPORT

Unclassified

18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS
PAGE

Unclassified

19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF ABSTRACT

Unclassified

20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

Unlimited

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Purpose:

To characterize a spontaneous epithelial-to-mesenchymal conversion (EMT) in the non-transformed "functional normal" mammary epithelial cell line SCp2.

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- Determine if alterations in growth factor expression and regulation are accompanied by changes in ECM and metalloproteinases expression.
- Determine if the presence of 3D structure is critical to stopping spontaneous and induced conversion.

Technical Progress:

- Determine if the mesenchymal conversion in SCp2 cells is associated with tumorigenesis.

Rationale:

EMT-like changes have been associated with mammary gland tumorigenesis.

1. To examine tumorigenic potential, converted (SCpg2) and non-converted cells were injected subcutaneously (s.c.) into nude mice. SCp2 cells did not form tumors within 3 months after injection. SCpg2 cells were tumorigenic with a progressive increase in tumorigenicity with increasing passage number.
2. The tumors generated were further evaluated by cytohistochemistry and were found to form undifferentiated spindle cell tumors capable of invasive growth. Immunocytochemistry showed the tumors to be cytokeratin 8 and alpha smooth muscle actin negative and vimentin positive.
3. The re-cultured SCpg2 tumor cells expressed vimentin and no cytokeratins or E-cadherin.
4. Anchorage-independent growth assays showed an increase in colony formation in SCpg2 cells.
5. Due to the fact that there was increased tumorigenicity with increasing passage in culture, a cell culture tumor progression series was established. The progression series includes SCp2 cells, early passage and increasing passage SCpg2 cells.

- Determine if alterations in growth factor expression and regulation are accompanied by changes in ECM and metalloproteinase expression.

Rationale:

Growth factors and ECM molecules have been shown to induce EMT in other cell culture systems and alterations in their expression have also been implicated in malignant progression. In addition, alterations in ECM degrading proteinases have been shown to occur during tumor progression in the mammary gland.

1. There was a progressive increase in latent TGF- β in the SCpg2 cells with passage in culture as compared to the non-malignant SCp2 cells. The highly malignant late passage SCpg2 cells also expressed activated TGF- β .
2. Associated with increased tumorigenicity and TGF- β expression was altered expression of laminin-1. As determined by indirect immunofluorescence the α -chain of laminin was not expressed in SCp2 cells while both β - and γ -chains were present. While the SCpg2 cells express all 3 chains of laminin-1.
3. The expression of a complete laminin in the early transitional SCpg2 cells resulted in hormone-induced β -casein synthesis without the addition of exogenous ECM. However, continued passage in culture of SCpg2 cells resulted in the loss of hormone and ECM-induced lactogenic differentiation in the late transitional SCpg2 cells.
4. Accompanied with the above changes was the up-regulation of metalloproteinases. This included increased expression of gelatinases A and B, and two unidentified metalloproteinases (34 and 44 kd) after EMT.

- Determine if the presence of 3D structure is critical to stopping the spontaneous and TGF- β induced mesenchymal conversion

Rationale:

Loss of tissue structure and perturbed growth factor responsiveness are linked and lead to tumorigenesis

1. Exogenous addition of TGF- β and/or soluble laminin-1 resulted in increased conversion of SCp2 cells in 2-D (on plastic).
2. Pre-clustered SCp2 cells in 2-D converted when exogenous TGF- β or laminin-1 was added.
3. Pre-clustered SCp2 cells in 3-D Matrigel or collagen-1 cultures did not convert with or without the addition of TGF- β